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Apollo and Daphne, and Other Bronze Groups after Bernini

THE BRONZE REDUCTIONS after famous sculptures are the least considered in the wide field of bronze studies; it is perfectly understandable, since they are often the least inspiring part of our collections. But it is a very promising field of investigation: not burdened with the stressful questions about date and attribution, we may focus on observation and make comparisons across a wide range of versions. This will help in the end to identify the idiosyncrasies of French, or Roman, bronzes, for instance. This art of repetition and variation has no proper name as yet, and I would venture to propose, copying the terminology of prints, the term "*bronzes d'interprétation*". Among thousands of decorative bronzes, one would expect to see Bernini more than fairly represented, given the lasting popularity of his works and their wide range. But the scarcity of bronzes related to his creations has always puzzled me. Their relatively limited number allows us to consider them as a group and to find great consistency in this type of production, a thing which would be much more difficult for the reductions after Coustou or Girardon, for instance.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss some of these bronzes. In Bernini's oeuvre, the original works in this medium are amazingly few, and the sculptor clearly expressed to Chantelou his view of bronze as artistically inferior to marble, at least for portrait sculpture.[1] This situation is especially striking when compared to Algardi's attitude toward bronze in general and specifically when it comes to reductions and diffusion of his own inventions. From Bernini's religious commissions, there are very few echoes in bronze: mainly some casts after the *Saint Bibiana* and the *Beata Ludovica Albertoni*. But the most famous of Bernini's religious groups, the *Ecstacy of Saint Theresa*, does not seem ever to have had the honour of being reproduced in bronze. Nor did the angels of the Ponte Sant'Angelo, which would have made as lovely a set in

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Gianlorenzo Bernini (after), *Apollo and Daphne*; see further below, fig. 51

bronze or in porcelain as the Apostles in San Giovanni in Laterano. So the obvious relationship we would assume between fame and reproduction is not evident in this case.

Some of the existing bronzes bear a clear relationship with highly developed models from the sculptor's hand. This seems to be the case with all the pieces related to the Piazza Navona fountain[2] or the monument to Countess Matilda of Canossa, for example,[3] although in these instances the possibility cannot be excluded that the bronzes were cast after some *ricordo*, either made under the artist's supervision or not, rather than after a *modello*.

Some others (most of them in fact) are closely related to existing terracottas, often considered to be models but usually good copies made from the marbles, with no direct connection with the artist's studio. This is clearly the case with the *Saint Bibiana*,[4] widely copied in clay;[5] the same applies to the *Beata Ludovica Albertoni*,[6] which was a popular subject of study, as evidenced by the surviving modelled reductions.[7]

Rather than examining the status of these derivations, here we will only consider the bronzes which are universally admitted as being reduced copies after Bernini's works. This question, important in itself and of crucial significance for the sculptor's *fortuna critica*, has been curiously little studied, if at all, within the ever increasing field of Berniniana. Although a series of these bronzes was shown in the Edinburgh Bernini exhibition in 1988,[8] they were included mainly to illustrate the corresponding marbles which for obvious reasons could not be exhibited; that is probably the reason why their provenance was not discussed in the exhibition.

One of the earliest mentions of decorative casts after Bernini is provided by the correspondence between the French government and the *abbate* Elpidio Benedetti, its agent in Rome. The letters were published by Daniela Di Castro Moscati,[9] those relating to the silver casts after Bernini being written in the span of two years (1664–65), the same period as Bernini's visit to Paris was planned and undertaken. In December 1661, Benedetti had first suggested having reductions made in silver after antique models.[10] But the first group to be ready, before 22 April 1664, seems to have been the four River Gods, after Bernini's figures for the Piazza Navona fountain:[11] "Which I thought of sending along with Cardinal Chigi's things ... I will send as well the four silver statuettes showing the four rivers of the fountain of Piazza Navona, and I would expect, for these and for the others which are being made, some remittance".[12] On 13 May, he also mentioned a project of casts after four statues, "the

most beautiful in town", all by Bernini as we understand from the following letters; he also pleaded for some payment, as he was wont to do constantly (20 May, 3 June, 15 July, 19 August). On 22 July,[13] he reported that the models were being made, which must mean the reductions or the waxes. That could mean that they had not yet been cast. The first model ready to be cast was the *Apollo and Daphne*, on 27 October 1664: "The Daphne model came out very nicely, and so will the silver cast. It will be rather tall because it would not have looked so good if smaller, and surely it will be a piece worthy of His Majesty's chambers."[14] The casting continued in November, and a pendant piece was in preparation.[15] On 13 October 1665, he wrote: "I suppose by the time this letter reaches Paris the two cases with the Daphne and the tapestries will also have arrived, and for the first I have had a base made in marble *bianco e nero*, very beautiful ... which I will send at the first opportunity with the other figure of David. These two will in due course be accompanied by the Rape of Proserpina and a Neptune, also from among the most beautiful works of the Cavaliere Bernini."[16]

One fact has been overlooked, the mention of Bernini actually seeing the casts and approving them: "I showed him the David, finished, which did not please him any less than had the Daphne; you may expect the same for the Rape of Proserpina and the Neptune which are being made".[17] Elpidio Benedetti must have been replying to a request from the French government for reassurance as to the quality of the pieces, and the phrasing is slightly ambivalent, cautious, even ironic ("did not please him any less than [the other]"). I doubt very much that Bernini could genuinely have liked these bibelot-like objects: although immensely concerned with his own fame, he never showed much desire to disseminate his creations through the medium of small bronzes. The partially gilded silver groups must have been especially distasteful for him, transforming a beautiful *concetto* made of marble (and the crux of Bernini's work also lies in its specific relation to the medium, which is an important part of its meaning) into a side-table ornament. The sculptor had just returned from France,[18] from a not overly successful visit, but nevertheless with charge of the Louvre project. I do not think he could have expressed any other views about these casts, and, anyway, they were already finished. The evidence clearly suggests that the sculptor had no part in any stages of the project to make these casts, whether the reduction process, the preparation of the waxes or the finishing.

The last letter from Benedetti relating to this project alludes to the making of a *Gladiatore* in silver (2 November 1666).[19] It has been identified with a work of similar subject recorded in the royal collection, to which we shall return, but the inventory specifies: "*argent d'Allemagne*", so the two cannot be the same and, from its description, the royal collection piece seems likely to have been a reduction of the famous antiquity in the Borghese collection, probably made in a centre such as Augsburg. The *Gladiatore* reference is more likely to have been an imprecise name given to the Ludovisi *Mars*, which was present in the royal collections and clearly described there.[20] The aforementioned silver casts formed part of a bigger group of silver sculpture in the French royal collection. Fourteen pieces are listed in the inventories: it has long been published in French, but an English translation of this list is here provided:[21]

536. A Gladiator, German silver, holding a sword in one hand and a shield in the other, clad in drapery of gilded silver, its regular-shaped *terrasse* base, also in silver-gilt, around 13 inches high

537. A two-figure group, German silver, representing Tarquin and Lucretia; the drapery and the *terrasse* base made of gilded silver, around 17 inches high

538. A figure of Hercules, Italian silver, carrying the Erymanthian boar, made by Giambologna, height with the boar around 17 inches

539. A figure by Bernini, Italian silver, depicting a Moor holding a dolphin by the tail, carried on a conch shell of gilded copper, this figure representing one of the Piazza Navona fountains, around 22 inches high.

540. A three-figure group, Italian silver, representing the Rape of the Sabine, by Giambologna, around 18 inches high

541. Another group, also depicting the Rape of the Sabine

542. A figure of Hercules, in white German silver, fighting the hydra, which is of gilded silver, on a flat *terrasse* base, around 15 inches high

543. A group, Italian silver, representing Daphne pursued by Apollo, design by Bernini

544. A group of a Hercules slaying a centaur, Italian silver, around 16 inches high

545. A Saint George on horseback, slaying the dragon which is on a kind of rock, on which may be seen frogs and lizards, all of German silver, part white, part gilded, 15 inches high

546. A figure of Neptune, in silver, clad with a drapery across one shoulder, carrying a copper trident, on a plinth of gilded copper, 20 inches high

547. A group of two silver figures, depicting Pluto with a gilded copper crown abducting Eurydice [sic] and a copper Cerberus, on a flat *terrasse* base, also of copper, on which there lies a silver trident, the whole group 2 feet 3 inches high

548. A figure of David with his sling on a *terrasse* base, on which there is a gilt-bronze trophy of arms, 21 inches high

549. A figure of Mars, on a *terrasse* base with trophies of arms, clasping his knee with both hands, one also holding his sword, and under his leg a small Cupid holding an arrow and his quiver, 18 inches high.



FIG. 47
German, 17th century,
after Giambologna
Ewer with Nessus and Deianeira
Partially gilt silver, H. 40,5 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris

What is absolutely expected is the presence of casts after Giambologna, some made in Italy, others in Germany - two Sabine groups, three Labours of Hercules, the latter sculptures which were actually first modelled to be cast in silver. A ewer in silver (fig. 47), depicting Nessus and Dejanira, in parcel-gilt silver, is the only surviving example of this kind of object from the royal collections and compares closely to the other groups and figures listed above. The *Tarquin and Lucretia* group also falls more or less within Giambologna's sphere as it is probably after a model attributed to Hubert Gerhard.[22] It is regrettable that we do not know anything further about no. 545 in the inventory, which sounds tantalizingly like an object in the style of Wenzel Jamnitzer.

However, the striking feature of this list is the significant presence of models after compositions by Bernini, six pieces. We find the *Apollo and Daphne*, the *Pluto and Proserpina*, the *Neptune*, the *David* and probably the Ludovisi *Mars* (which Bernini restored), all of which are mentioned in the letters. Only the *Moor* from Piazza Navona does not appear in the surviving correspondence. It is also unclear why the four silver casts after the river gods of the Navona fountain do *not* appear. They were sent from Rome to Paris between 22 April and 13 May 1664. Lorenzo Magalotti saw them in Versailles in May 1668 and was slightly ambivalent about them: he describes a room lavishly decorated,

"around it, on some stands, there are various figures of silver, in particular the Four rivers of the Piazza Navona fountain, which Bernini must have been not displeased to see here."[23] He may have seen them, but there is not the smallest hint in the *Journal de Chantelou* about these objects. A silence one feels must be meaningful ....

So, half of the silver sculptures in the French royal collection were after Bernini. Eighteen such silver groups also appear in the posthumous inventory of Cardinal Mazarin.[24] Without entering into a complicated discussion about the identification of the different pieces, it should be noted that the cardinal owned two silver groups after Giambologna, *Hercules and Anteus* and *Hercules and the Centaur*, while he also possessed a group of four figures, the Rivers from the Piazza Navona fountain on a base of gilded copper. A complete model of the fountain, in silver, was still displayed in the palais Mazarin in 1664 and could work with water. Several versions existed, even one in massive gold, a gift of Monsignore Bonacurtio to the Princess of Rossano in 1653.[25] It has incidentally not hitherto been noted that yet another of these reductions in silver appears in the collections of Peter the Great.[26] Strangely enough, the eclectic French royal collection of bronzes does not contain a single piece related to Bernini, the closest to it being the *Saint Veronica* after Mocchi.[27] The silver statues, like the rest of the plate, were eventually melted down to provide funding for the never-ending wars on the eastern borders of France. So it is most unlikely that we will ever know anything more about them.

As to the bronzes, some versions are documented in the early eighteenth century, almost one hundred years after the marbles they copy. So it is difficult to ascertain when and where these bronzes were made. Coincidentally or not, the models currently known are all after the same compositions as the silver casts sent from Rome to Louis XIV - Neptune, David, Pluto and Proserpina, Apollo and Daphne. It might be a coincidence but, as most of these bronzes have all the characteristics of small bronze sculptures produced in Paris shortly after 1700, it may be more than that.

Of the *Neptune*, several casts are known, all displaying only the god and a dolphin; the best version seems to be the one now in Los Angeles.[28] The naturalistic *terrasse* of this model is very close to some other bronzes of the same kind and probably of the same type of manufacture. If it is accepted that the model is not by Bernini himself, then the suppression of the triton in the original marble group and its replacement with the fish become

quite understandable. In my opinion therefore these bronzes were not produced in the sculptor's circle and it is important to recall the words of Jennifer Montagu: "Gianlorenzo Bernini cannot be regarded as contributing anything to this genre .... If this proves that some moulds of such reductions existed during Bernini's lifetime, there is nothing to disprove the impression that these had been made by enterprising copyists, and very probably without the master's authorisation."[29] So the Neptune must follow the pattern of the other derivations, for which there is considerable evidence that they were not produced in Bernini's circle.

The *David* was one of the most popular compositions to be cast in bronze, with many variants. Jacques Doucet owned one which he acquired from the baroness Roger de Sivry's collection.[30] Paul Vitry wrote the entries for the Doucet sale catalogue in 1912 and remarked: "It is conceivable that, though the model is from Italy, the bronze is a French production".[31] This is hardly surprising since Girardon himself also had a wax copy of it, if we are to believe the engraving of his *Galerie* (the statuette does not appear in the posthumous inventory).[32] In the Doucet version, the lyre is understood as such, which is not always the case, although it has lost its distinctive eagle head. A stone is lying on the strings, a queer addition to the original. By examining these small variations, which it would be too tedious to enumerate further, we become progressively aware that these discrepancies, verging sometimes on the absurd in some other bronze versions, reveal that the original model, the marble in the Borghese collection, was not accessible or familiar to the makers of the models for these small bronze versions. Instead, the models were made after other bronzes or copies in other materials, and, to my belief, in Paris. Another version quite close to Jacques Doucet's was sold in Paris in 1983 (figs. 48, 49).[33] It has the same kind of finish on the draperies as the *Neptune* in the Getty; the lyre has become a kind of formless slab. As on the previous version, the cuirass is smooth, without scales. Another one bears on the plinth two letters, *LD*.[34] Could this one have been cast after a copy by Laurent Delvaux, who was familiar with this exercise and also produced variations and pastiches on Berninian motives?[35] In the version in the British Royal Collection,[36] the four limbs of the figure and the string of the sling are cast separately and assembled in a way which is a common feature for all these bronzes, and indeed many such French bronzes from the same period. The *terrasse* is the part which differs most from the original and employs more variations, as the founder could probably





FIGS. 48, 49
Gianlorenzo Bernini (after)
David (and detail of base)
Bronze, H. 53.5 cm
Private collection, Paris

devise it as he found convenient, without bothering to copy any specific model.

The most interesting of these derivations are the casts after the two Borghese marble groups, *Pluto and Proserpina* and *Apollo and Daphne*. Many of these are described in French collections and in Parisian sales catalogues. One of the earliest documented references to these, however, is related to the Grand Tour of George Parker.[37] During his trip to Italy (1719–22), he bought thirteen bronzes, among them groups of *Apollo and Daphne* and *Pluto and Proserpina* (figs. 50, 51). Both were sold in London a few years ago.[38] They are both of what one might call the 'larger' size (more than 80 centimetres tall), which is quite characteristic of these very bulky bronzes made in the early eighteenth century. They are quite different from smaller casts after the same models, which seem to me to date from the second half of the eighteenth century and possibly to be Roman.[39]

Because Parker bought them in Italy, the two groups have always been assumed to be Italian, and more specifically Roman. It is of course impossible to prove that they are not, but it must be stated there is nothing like them in the documented Roman bronzes of this period. Reductions for display on furniture of this type are amazingly rare in Rome at this time, if they exist at all. In manufacture and finish (preparation of the model, casting technique, chiselling and so on, textures of the *terrasses*), they fit absolutely within the general characteristics, as they are understood, of the Parisian bronzes mentioned above. This does not of course mean they could not be Roman, but this provenance cannot be taken as a given. This will be considered further when discussing the other groups. One curious discrepancy should be noted between all the bronze versions known to me of the Pluto and Proserpina group and the marble original: Proserpina's left hand does not come into contact with Pluto's brow as it does in the original. Thus the bronze versions fail to reproduce the amazing effect of this gesture which anybody seeing the marble group directly will remember, and which enhances the savage relentless purpose of Pluto. By contrast, in the bronze versions she throws up her arms in despair, a gesture which weakens the composition. Quite apart from the practical consideration that the two figures might have been cast separately, it seems likely that the people who prepared the models had more in mind the famous group of the same subject by François Girardon, in which the goddess throws her arms upwards in just the same way. The Girardon group was widely reproduced in bronze, in different sizes[40] – I suspect, by the same people.





FIG. 50
Gianlorenzo Bernini (after)
Pluto and Proserpina
Bronze, H. 80 cm
Bought by Thomas, 1st Earl of Macclesfield in Italy in 1719–22; current whereabouts unknown

FIG. 51
Gianlorenzo Bernini (after)
Apollo and Daphne
Bronze, H. 87.6 cm
Bought by Thomas, 1st Earl of Macclesfield in Italy in 1719–22; current whereabouts unknown

But to return to the purchases of our travelling Englishman, George Parker, future Earl of Macclesfield. He ordered in Florence during his Grand Tour two large bronzes by Pietro Cipriani after the antique, now in the Getty Museum, and bought thirteen smaller ones, delivered to England in 1723.[41] They were mainly reductions after the Antique – the *Apollino*, the *Dancing Faun*, the *Porcellino*, the *Wrestlers* and the *Venus* from Florence, the *Germanicus* after the statue bought by Louis XIV from the Montalto collection in 1664, the *Centaur and Cupid* and the *Small Faun* from the Borghese collection, and the *Callipygian Venus* from the Farnese collection. The consignment also included three modern works: the two Bernini groups[42] and the *Marsyas* after Pierre II Le Gros. They were bought through John Smibert (1688–1751), a Scottish painter who







FIG. 52, 53
Gianlorenzo Bernini (after)
Apollo and Daphne
(and detail of base)
Bronze, H. 85 cm
Musée Fabre, Montpellier

FIG. 54
Gianlorenzo Bernini (after)
Apollo and Daphne
Bronze, H. 76.5 cm
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen,
Dresden

eventually emigrated to America, dying in Boston. He was at this time (1717–20) travelling in Italy, trying no doubt to improve his style, although through this transaction he certainly improved the health of his purse. We do not know how or where he obtained them, but apparently not from Florence. Giovanni Giacomo Zamboni, diplomat and dealer living in London, was also Soldani's agent. When he asked the sculptor for bronzes with a height of one *braccia fiorentina*, that is, *c.* 58.6 cm, Soldani answered that he did not have moulds of that size and told him to look for such bronzes in Rome.[43] Does that mean that this kind of bronze was available there or was produced there? We need further evidence before any conclusions can be drawn. Many other versions comparable in size, plinth and finish are known.[44] Not included in the current study are the obviously later ones, which reflect the change of display in the Galleria Borghese in the late eighteenth century. The original display is known through an engraving by Nicolas Dorigny (1693), in which the *Apollo and Daphne* appears as a kind of high relief,

with a much smaller marble *terrasse*.[45] The current display was conceived by Asprucci in the 1780s, then modified by Vincenzo Pacetti when a new pedestal was created by Lorenzo Cardelli. It transformed the group into a free-standing gallery piece. An early testimony to this change of perception may be found in a reduction by Francesco Righetti,[46] bearing the date 1791. The base is not slavishly copied from the new installation, but it is very clear that the sculptor conceived the group as a central free-standing piece.[47] In the Macclesfield bronze, as in the others from the group, the unbalanced character of the composition is absolutely understood and the shape of the *terrasse* follows quite closely that of the original marble base.

The assumption that the Macclesfield pieces were made in Rome has no support, as they cannot be matched to anything similar produced in the city around this time. On the other hand, they are clearly related to the sort of bronzes then being made in Paris. The same applies to the Apollo and Daphne group in Dresden (fig. 54) bought by Leplat in Italy at just the same time ("2 *grouppe de bronse demy grandeur naturel l'enlèvement de Prosperine et l'Apollon et Dafne du cavalier Bernini*").[48] The Montpellier bronze (figs. 52, 53) is also quite close to the marble group.[49] It is 85 centimetres high, has a nice lacquer patina, and a kind of square base, quite heavy in design. Obviously, this part did not need to be cast from the model but could be adjusted directly in the wax by the founder; it is noticeable that among the surviving comparable versions this part always differs from one to another. The Montpellier bronze arrived in the museum with the Valédeau bequest of 1836 and was known to Wittkower, who listed it as an early copy.[50] As in other bronze groups of the period, there is perfect focus on the global effect, a pragmatic employment of techniques to reduce undercutting, any difficulties in moulding, and to minimize the chiselling required, through bright contrasts. The overall form of the well-known sculpture is immediately recognizable, though it is not very accurate in the details. The back of the group, Daphne's hair, the laurel bush, the flying drapery are considerably simplified and certain elements, though of capital importance in the dramatic economy of the marble group, for example the tendrils, are simply missed out.

The same applies to the Dijon version (fig. 55).[51] It is cast in the same way, arms and legs separately. The patina is slightly redder and there are considerable variations in the drapery, or the shape of the bark on Daphne's legs. The bridge between the two figures, a bushy branch of laurel in the marble original with a strong



FIG. 55
Gianlorenzo Bernini (after),
Apollo and Daphne
Bronze, H. 76.5 cm
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon



FIG. 56
Gianlorenzo Bernini (after)
Apollo and Daphne
Bronze
In the Grandjean collection in 1900;
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

structural function, is a little awkwardly treated, as a mere junction between the two figures which in the bronze versions are usually cast separately. The vertical sprouts which hide the marble bridge are omitted. The same applies to the roots springing from Daphne's right toes, usually neglected. It really looks as if the model used for this cast had not been prepared with any direct knowledge of the original, but simply using a secondary source. Unfortunately, the provenance of the Dijon bronze is unknown; it ought to be traceable among the numerous Revolutionary confiscations, in which bronzes abound, but this does not seem to be the case.

Several of these groups are mentioned in eighteenth-century collections or sale catalogues: one could say that they were almost *de rigueur* among the most distinguished amateurs: Jean de Jullienne had one with a gilt-bronze base, which was bought by Rémy in 1767.[52] Randon de Boisset had one which was sold in 1777 with the rest of his collections, and bought by a sculptor named Aubert.[53] Another was bought by the merchant Lebrun from the Leboeuf auction in 1783.[54] These groups still appear in the early nineteenth-century sales.[55] Another is described in the de Cotte collection as "*Un morceau très capital en bronze de la plus belle fonte et de grande proportion représentant le sujet d'Apollon et Daphné, par Le Bernin*".[56] The lasting popularity of the composition is also widely testified by the number of reductions in other materials, from marble to plaster.[57] These reductions might of course have been made after the same models used by the founders or even after the bronzes. There is a curious instance of this practice, although very late, in the Soumaya Museum in Mexico City. A soapy marble reduction displayed there is signed by Eugenio Battiglia, a specialist in small-scale sculpture working in Florence around 1900. But it is clearly made after one of the bronzes we are discussing here, with the pre-Neoclassical *terrasse*. To this group of bronzes we may add the one exhibited in Paris in 1900, from the Grandjean collection, now in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris (fig. 56),[58] with a steep-sided base. It is very close to the original, closer than any of the others, even the Montpellier and Macclesfield versions, which are among the best.[59] The example formerly with Duveeen, which I know only from an old picture, seems quite similar to those.[60] All of them are of the large size, around 80 centimetres, which is rather bigger than the average size of late eighteenth-century bronzes. It is an interesting phenomenon that, when the same model is repeated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, at least in French bronzes, a progressive decrease in size may be observed, probably

due to the changing relationship of small bronzes to furniture within the broader context of interior decoration.

The Grandjean *Apollo and Daphne* mentioned above was exhibited in 1900 in the *Exposition retrospective de l'Art français des origines à 1800*, part of the Exposition Universelle, without any reference to Bernini. That seems scarcely just, but might be not far from the truth. I wonder therefore whether these reductions were not one of the many products put on to the market by the prolific bronze manufacturers in eighteenth-century Paris? Although Bernini's reception in France was not an unalloyed success, this group has always been popular, thanks to these bronzes. François Girardon may have had one reduction in wax, listed in his posthumous inventory.[61] This small wax group might be a copy after Bernini, but could also have a relationship with a three-figure group of the same subject, modelled in France in the early eighteenth century for casting in bronze.[62] If not strictly a pastiche, it is certainly a tribute to the famous Borghese group. But in one way or the other, it speaks to us nevertheless of the fortune of some of Bernini's inventions, as documented in small-scale bronzes in eighteenth-century France.

Renaissance and Baroque Bronzes

in and around the Peter Marino Collection

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